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Jan Gyan Prakashan Series—65

AUM

# THE GREAT GAYATRI

JAN GYAN PRAKASHAN
NEW DELHI-5 (INDIA)

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# The Gayatri Mantra

## AN EXPOSITION OF THE GAYATRI MANTRA

Below we give the Gayatri Mantra and the meaning of the words that make up the mantra. A detailed explanation of each word has been given in the pages that follow. During the course of our prayer it is important that we know what the mantra conveys. To repeat the mantra in a parrot-like fashion will serve no useful purpose.

## THE GAYATRI MANTRA AND ITS MEANING

OM BHUR BHUVAH SWAH. TAT SAVITUR
VARENYAM. BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHI.
DHIYO YO NAH PRACHODAYAT.

OM: God is called OM because He protects.

BHUR: Who is the basis of the life of the whole universe and Who is self-existent.

BHUVAH: Who is free from all pains and whose contact frees the soul from all troubles.

SWAH: Who pervades the multiformed universe and sustains all.

SAVITUR: He is the creator and energiser of the whole universe.

DEVASYA: The giver of all happiness and whose communion is sought by all.

VARENYAM: Worthy of acceptance the most Excellent.

BHARGO: Pure and Purifier.

TAT: That very God.

DHIMAHI: Let us embrace, so that.

YO: That God.

PRACHODAYAT: May direct.

NAH: Our.

DHIYO: Mental faculties.



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# Aum

AUM is the supreme name of God. The word AUM has the power of expressing various ideas and qualities. The word AUM is made up of three letters, namely: A, U, and M. These letters express the three great qualities of God.

'A' denotes the power of God to create the universe.

'U' denotes the power of God to preserve the universe.

'M' denotes the power of God to dissolve this universe. On this basis God is known to us by three other names. 'A': Brahma (Creator), 'U': Vishnu (Preserver) and 'M': (Destroyer).

When we pronounce the word AUM, the vocal organs express these qualities of God.

To say A (ah) we have to open our mouths. Thus, 'A' is also the first letter of the alphabet of all languages. Thus 'A' signifies the beginning of or the creation of the universe.

When saying 'U' (oo) the mouth is still kept open and the lips are curved. This signifies the quality of maintaining, preserving and sustaining.

When 'M' is pronounced the lips have to be closed. This signifies the quality of bringing something to an end. Thus we know that God is the creator, preserver and destroyer of this universe. This natural Law of God has been in practice for an indefinite period of time and will continue to be so for an indefinite period of time.

The word 'AUM' also has two special meanings. It means OMNIPRESENT and PROTECTOR. God is present in every particle of the atom and there is not a place imaginable where His presence is not to be felt. Being omnipresent He is protecting this universe through His power, Knowledge and His laws. God is also the protector of His devotees.

**PURPORT OF AUM:** Oh All-pervading, Creator, Preserver and Destroyer, Thou art my Protector. Under Thy care and guidance may I be righteous.



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# Bhur

The first three words of the Gayatri Mantra, namely, **bhur, bhuvah, swah** are called **MAHAVYAHRITI.** These three words express the nature of God. They express His oneness.

The word **Bhur** indicates the existence of God. God is eternal. He was present at the time of creation, is present during preservation and will be present at the dissolution of the universe. God was present even before the creation of this universe and will be present even after the dissolution of the universe. God does not undergo a change at any time, neither is He subjected to failings and sufferings as we are. His changeless state remains constant at all times.

BHUR is indicative of life (Prana). God is the life-giver and He sustains our life. God is the source of all life. He establishes life into our bodies. We live because He has given us life and we shall die when He will take away our life. Our life is maintained or governed according to the laws of God. May we through His life-power protect the lives of others. Never should we be guilty of taking the life of another being. That is the work of God, our life-giver. The life-giver God is called BHUR.

The word BHUR also means the earth. On this earth we are born and sustained. God has provided us with life-giving air and nourishing substances for the maintenance of our life. Being the Creator and Protector of this universe, God is also BHUR.

**PURPORT OF BHUR :** O Changeless God, our Life-giver and Preserver, grant me Thy life-giving force so that I may live through Thy Grace.



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# Bhuvah

BHUVAH is indicative of God's absolute consciousness. God is a Self-Existent Conscious Being. He is conscious of Himself and also of others. His consciousness vibrates within the particle of even the minutest atom. Being absolute conscious He is capable of controlling and governing this universe. His consciousness helps to regulate the governing laws of the universe. That absolute conscious Being is BHUVAH.

The word BHUVAH also means remover of pains and sufferings (Apana). We see pain, suffering, distress and calamities around us. Disease, old age, misery and death cause mental grief to mankind. Earthquakes, forest fires and floods are natural disasters which bring untold misery to many. Even man through sheer ignorance violates the Laws of Nature and thus faces serious consequences. Similarly, lust, anger, and pride are vices which have done incalculable harm to man. Under these circumstances devoted supplication to God will help to remove our pains and sorrows.

Pain and suffering are merely expressions of our mind. The degree and intensity of pain is felt by our mind. That is why we are often mentally aggrieved. Our imagination sometimes tends to multiply the intensity of our pains and sorrows. If someone else has made some progress in life we become envious. We pity ourselves or our kith and kin, if fortune and worldly possessions have not been kind to us. Thinking of the unknown future that lies ahead, we foolishly brood and suffer mental agony. If we only begin to view these things in a different light, our sorrows will no longer oppear to us as sorrow. Change of outlook towards these things in life can only come about through intense devotion to God. The remover of our pains and sorrows is that God Who is BHUVAH.

BHUVAH is indicative of God's relationship with the celestial world. The great expanse of the sky, boundless and void, denotes the greatness of God. Even greater than the sky is BHUVAH, or God.

**PURPORT OF BHUVAH :** O Abode of Happiness, I perceive Thee. Treat Thou me with compassion. Being under Thy benign care I am free from pains and sorrows .



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# Swah

Swah is symbolic of God's bliss. Except God, everyone else experiences pain, trouble, calamity and obstacles in life. Heavenly bliss is only enjoyed by God. Human beings and other creatures also lead a life of happiness. But their happiness is momentary and not everlasting. Man jubilates over his successes in life and feels happy. He bubbles with happiness. Man also boasts of his wealth, strength and his knowledge. Man seeks pleasure in life through his sensory organs and gets absorbed in them. Yet, are those pleasurable experiences of a permanent nature? Can it be said that pain and suffering have left no traces behind? In reality, happiness is foreshadowed by unhappiness just as day is followed by night and light by darkness.

But God's bliss is of a different nature. His exultation is not affected by misery and unhappiness. This is so because there is no imperfection in Him and He is not subjected to deficiency. He is not lacking in knowledge. God is All-happiness. One who has realised the divinity of God becomes happy. To be able to establish oneness with God is to experience true happiness. That Blissful God is SWAH.

SWAH also denotes that God is All-pervading (Vyana). He pervades the universe and thus keeps the world under His supervision. That controller and director of this universe is SWAH.

God has also created the sun, the stars and many other planets. They are all performing their functions through the power of God. The controller of these heavenly bodies is SWAH.

These three words are indicative of :

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| BHUR | PRANA | THE EARTH | TRUE EXISTENCE |
| BHUVAH | APANA | THE SKY | CONSCIOUSNESS |
| SWAH | VYANA | HEAVEN | BLISS |

**PURPORT OF SWAH** : O Giver of happiness, All-Blissful, May I enjoy the nectar of bliss in Thy Abode.



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## *The Names of the Gayatri Mantra*

The Gayatri Mantra is known by the following three different names :

(1) GAYATRI MANTRA

(2) GURU MANTRA

(3) SAVITRI MANTRA

**GAYATRI MANTRA** : This is its most important name. The word Gayatri has been given two different interpretations. Firstly, the Gayatri is a prosody consisting of three stanzas, namely :

TAT SAVITUR VARENYAM : Glorification of God.

BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHI : Communion with God.

DHIYO YO NAH PRACHODAYAT:Entreaty to God.

Secondly, Gayatri also protects its devotee. One who recites the mantra with devotion and leads a religious life is assured of divine protection when calamities befall.

**GURU MANTRA** : Before the guru (teacher) gives to his pupil the knowledge of the Vedas, he first makes him understand the religious significance of the Gayatri Mantra. During the Middle Ages the knowledge of the Gayatri Mantra was not revealed to the masses. Rishi Dayanand was the first religious leader to advocate that this mantra is for the benefit of all and not the treasured property of a chosen few.

**SAVITRI MANTRA** : In this mantra God has been glorified by the use of the word **savita**. God is called **Savita** because He is the Creator and the Life-spring of the universe. Hence, this mantra is also called Savitri Mantra.

**MANTRA** : The Gayatri is a mantra. The hymns of the Vedas are called mantras. The mantra is a means through which true knowledge of all substances and truth (satya-vidya) is obtained. The mantra is so called because it offers hope and security to a devotee who puts into practice the injunction (advice) of the mantra. The Vedic mantras are the source of all true knowledge and substances known to man. This wisdom of the Vedas is for the preservation and salvation of mankind. Hence, the verses and the hymns of the Vedas are called **mantras**.

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# Varenyam

Varenyam means Who is worthy of acceptance and Who is the Most Excellent. Rishi Dayanand writes : "YAD VARAM VARTUM ARHAM ATISHRESH-THAM TAT VARENYAM" which means that He Who is worthy of Acceptance and transcendent is Varenyam.

What are the objects worthy of acceptance in this world? Being a prisoner of delusion we hope to possess all the worldly riches. More often than not we are impatient to get them. Objects that gratify our senses appeal to our mind. But these worldly objects that satisfy our minds are perishable. Their effect is temporary. Having obtained these in a large measure we are dis-appointed in the end. Someone whom we should cherish to accept worthily is God. Having obtained Him we can hope to secure everlasting happiness. He is the Most Excellent Whom nothing can surpass. That God is VAREŃYAM.

Whom we once accept to Him we always belong. We live for Him and we die for Him. We and God then become inseparable. Once we have accepted Him, we dedicate our entire self to Him. Our life journey is directed by Him. Once we are happy in the thought that He has been entrusted with our cares, all fears and doubts in life disappear. That benevolent Being leads us to our ultimate destination and we look hopefully towards Him.

Varenyam also means One Who is eligible. We have elected Him to be our Leader. Our intellect and our power merges in God. Our happiness and our sorrows are in His hands. As a sincere devotee we accept His will. In whatever condition God keeps us we will be contented. We dedicate all our actions and thoughts to God because our God is VARENYAM.

**PURPORT OF VARENYAM** : O Pure and Defectless God, Thou art worthy of Reverence. I have dedicated myself to Thee. For me Thou art worthy of Acceptance.



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# Bhargo

BHARGO means Glorious Light. The power with which God destroys sins and afflictions is called BHARGO.

BHARGO is God's pure, faultless and sin-destroying glory. God is the Light of all lights. Thousands of suns appearing at the same time cannot match His Light. This is so because He is absolutely pure. He is without a blemish and He is faultless. He is All-Knowledgeable.

When gold is melted in the fire, its impurities are destroyed, and, then gold is extracted in its purest form. Sincere prayer brings that Light of God within us. Our soul has that Light but it is without lustre. It has been made impure with ignorance and enveloped our soul. We want that Light to shine in all its glory. We want it to be purified. We want the light of our soul to merge with the matchless Light of God. Close association with Him alone can bring us close to that Light.

We are moving in a world of darkness. Vices have taken control of our senses. Therefore the correct path is not visible to us. We have drifted away from the true Light. The splendour of our soul has been defiled. We are lost and we do not know where we are. We stumble. Our soul needs to be illumined. The dirt that has been covering it needs to be removed. That illumination, that purity, and that sanctification of the soul can only come about when we establish that BHARGO, the Glorious Light, in our hearts. His Light will bring back the lustre of our soul. The impurities and the veil of darkness will be destroyed for ever.

A devotee having received the Light will lead a pure life. He will vow that all his actions, words and thoughts will be free from sin.

**PURPORT OF BHARGO :** O Faultless, Untainted God, I have kindled that Light of Thine within my heart. That Light is removing my ignorance and destroying my sins. I am being purified.



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# Devasya

The word DEVA has many meanings. In all our Indian languages the word Deva has been widely used. In the words of the layman, it is the simple but chief name of God. Anyone who possesses extraordinary quality or personality, we address him as deva. But the only Deva of ours is God. In the Shwetashwatar Upanishad (6 : 11) it is said "EKO DEVAH SARVA BHUTESHU GUDHAH SARVA VYAPI SARVA BHUTANTARATMA" which means that the God Who is to be found everywhere and within everything is the only DEVA. We remember the same Deva or Paramatma in the Gayatri Mantra.

The word DEVA could be attributed to one who is charitable; one who gives light; one who gives radiance to others; one who has the power of movement; one who is praised; and one who is happy. All these qualities are found in God and, therefore, He is called DEVA. We have created many devas or devis because of the varied qualities and powers of God. These qualities and powers of God do not speak of His different entities or forms of existence. They merely denote His qualities. Based on these qualities other objects have been called devas also. But they do not possess the divine power and absolute consciousness of God. The sun and the moon give light, therefore, they are called devas. But they depend for their light on the Light of God. Wind has the power of movement, and it is called a deva. A person who is charitable is also a deva. Mother, father, guru and a learned person are all called deva. But the Mahadeva of all these devas is the One and Only Paramatma.

The deva of the Gayatri Mantra is the Self-illumined, Blissful, All-Knowledgeable and the All-Pervading God. That deva is the SAVITAA, *i.e.* the Creator, the Varenyam, the Most Excellent, and the Bhargo, the Light of all lights. We always remember that Deva. He can endow us with divine power and He is our Guide.

**PURPORT OF DEVASYA:** O Deva of all devas, Thou art the Giver of Light. My soul receives the Spiritual Light from Thee. I am experiencing Thy Divinity.



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# Dhimahi

DHIMAHI means to meditate, and to contemplate upon the glorious form of God.

When we sit and pray, we think of God. In order to fix our attention on God, it is necessary that we remove all other thoughts from our mind and be at peace. Peace of mind enables us to experience the power of God. Our mind is very fickle and it wavers. We have been praying for a long time yet our mind goes astray. Other thoughts come rushing into our mind. It is our duty to control the wavering mind. That mind must only have the thoughts of God within. If we have chosen Him as being Worthy of Acceptance and if we have understood His creative power, then it should not be difficult for us to concentrate on Him.

It is the nature of man to be attracted towards something that pleases him. A student is keen on his studies, while an artist is thinking only of his painting. A player on the field has his mind fixed on the game itself. This self-centredness is the key to divine contemplation. If we have truly understood the meaning of the Gayatri Mantra and have realised the greatness of God then it will be possible for us to meditate steadfastly.

When in contemplation we must forget our surroundings. Our cares and worries must vanish. Greed and fear must disappear. If we are in the sublime company of God then these worldly thoughts have no place in the world of meditation. Why should the dreadful happenings in the world become the subject of our thought when we have dedicated our entire self to God? Where the air is still, there the clay lamp burns majestically. In the same way calmness of mind and ease will help to establish our thoughts in God.

**PURPORT OF DHIMAHI:** O God, Thy Spiritual Light is within me. Thou art in my vision. My resolute mind is centred in Thee.



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# Dhiyo

DHI means intellect.

We have realized the divine power of God. We have seated Him in our hearts. Now what is there to pray for? What shall we ask Him? What kind of help do we want from Him? Should we ask Him for wealth? Should we ask Him for kingdom and sovereignty? Should we ask Him to remove our pains and sorrows? But having realized Him, these worldly objects have lost their significance.

Then, what ought to be desired that we should pray for? In the Gayatri Mantra we ask God for the highest intellect. Human beings are superior to the other creatures by virtue of the fact that they possess intelligence. Your intellect will enable you to rise towards prosperity. Therefore, we must ask God for good intellect. To possess the worldly riches will be an easy matter to attain if we have the intellect.

Another reason which urges us to ask for intellect is that we must possess the power of discrimination. We must be able to distinguish the right from wrong, truth from falsehood, and good from bad. Good intellect alone is sufficient for us to chart our destiny. Lack of it creates problems. Man becomes ignorant and he lingers in doubts. He does not see the true light. Intellect helps to dispel his ignorance and his doubts. In the Upanishads the intellect has been called the charioteer of the soul. Intellect has enabled men to reach great heights. Without it he is like a boat without a rudder. When the ship of our life is being battered by the stormy waves of the ocean of life then intellect is its principal pilot. Prayer for such intellect is the essence of the Gayatri Mantra.

**PURPORT OF DHIYO:** O Knowledgeable God. Thy Heavenly Grace is developing my powers of intellect. With my intellect I am gaining true knowledge.



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# Yo Nah Prachodayat

YO means That God. To whom do we pray for good intellect? To That God Whom we have adored as being worthy of acceptance, and Who is free of all defects.

NAH means ours. In the Gayatri Mantra, for whose intellect do we pray? Not only for our own intellect but for that of every one of us. We do not live only for ourselves but we belong to each other. We ought never to be satisfied only with our progress. Therefore, NAH here includes all our fellowmen, and we pray for all.

PRACHODAYAT means that we ask God to direct our energies in the right direction. When we ask God for good intellect, we also ask Him that our intellect should guide us to follow the correct path. We must move in the right direction and we must never deflect from the path of truth.

Intellect is merely an instrument or a means. Man can either put it to good use or he may abuse it. He can also be a wicked person. He can make others suffer and be arrogant. It is for that reason that we ask God to direct our intellect in the right direction. If we have sincere faith in God then we would not go against His will. We would not be vain. With good intellect we should also possess faith in God. Without intellect a man may develop blind faith. And this will lead to conceit and egoism. Man is ignorant and his knowledge is limited. His intellect can deceive him. God is All-knowledgeable and He alone can guide our intellect. He alone can inspire us to greater and nobler ideals. If our intellect is pure then we would entertain nobler thoughts. We would be truthful and we would always endeavour to perform virtuous acts. It will guide our mind, thoughts, and actions along the path of good conduct. Hence, the aim of our prayer is to ask God to grant us a pure mind and sound intellect.

**PURPORT OF PRACHODAYAT**: O Omniscient God, I seek Thy Guidance so that I may be able to direct my mind, intellect, and thought towards noble deeds, and it is my desire that I should always have Thee in my thoughts.



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# The Glory of The Gayatri Mantra

There are many mantras, couplets, psalms, hymns and devotional songs to be found in various religious scriptures that sing the praise of God. Among all these the Gayatri Mantra occupies a place of paramount importance.

Among the many creatures of the universe, man has been endowed with the highest intellect. It is with this supreme gift that man has gained supremacy over the lower beings and has succeeded in bringing under control the forces of nature. But it is essential that this intellect should be pure and untainted. In the Gayatri Mantra we pray for such an intellect. The Gayatri Mantra is not a means to attain wealth, strength, power and supremacy, and it is also not a weapon with which we hope to destroy our enemies or keep our sorrows away.

From the ancient times the Gayatri Mantra has been recited in our prayers. Bhisma Pitamaha advised Yudhisthira, in the Mahabharata, that the Gayatri Mantra can be recited at any time and at any place whether we are resting, walking or working. Peace of mind can be attained by anyone who chants this mantra with utmost reverence. A true devotee suffers no anguish. Rama, Sita, Janak and learned sages at all times sang the Gayatri.

The great saint of this century, Swami Vivekanand asserts that the Gayatri Mantra is a means to attain pure and refined intellect. We should always ask God to bestow us with such an intellect. Wisdom thus attained exhorts us to tread the path of righteousness and to perform noble deeds. In this way we are assured of true happiness and godly bliss.

Having known the glory of the Gayatri, we should recite the Gayatri Mantra with understanding, and not merely parrot-wise.



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